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Part II

*Diaspora:
The Classical Literary Canon
and Its Evolutions*

Chapter IIA

The Battle for the Modernists' Gogol: Bely and Remizov

One of the important acts of the Symbolists' project was a revision of nineteenth-century classical literary tradition. Considerable attention focused on one of its towering figures, Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), whom the moderns regarded as an exemplar of high art and verbal mastery. The Gogolian direction of modernist prose, along with the critical essays of its major writers, reflects this phenomenon. Great indebtedness to the master is especially notable in the writings of Andrei Bely and Aleksei Remizov. His work left a conscious imprint in their prerevolutionary fiction and became central in their critical prose of the thirties, the years of the modernists' last stance in the USSR. The championing of Gogol as a modern master extends into the postrevolutionary period through the mid-thirties. These years are especially crucial: they precede the impending decree on Socialist Realism as the exclusive literary style in the Soviet Republic of Letters. They also coincide with the blossoming of émigré literature and its self-confidence vis-à-vis the motherland. Among the main cultural figures engaged in the battle for the modernists' Gogol, along with Bely and Remizov, were artists in all spheres of culture: Meyerhold in the theater, Shostakovich in music, and Kozintsev in film. Gogol's work and his biography become an indelible part of creative consciousness of modern artists as of the writers of the Silver Age, who considered themselves to be his heirs.

Work on Gogol appeared at various dates and places of publication: Bely's book *Gogol's Artistry (Masterstvo Gogolia)* was published in Moscow in 1934, and Remizov's Gogol chapters in his collection of critical essays, *The Fire of Things (Ogon' veshchei)*, were published in Paris in 1954. Despite these differing dates, both Bely and Remizov were work-

ing on the Gogol materials from the late twenties to the early thirties. What unites them is the commonality of their approach in a continued, uninterrupted dialogue with the master, to whom their early work and the culture of the Silver Age are indebted. Indeed, in their critical work, what is most perceptible is the close and consistent attention to specific details and the deeper significance of Gogolian style. Moreover, these older writers' meditations on Gogol are imbued with their consciousness of personal responsibility for continuing the cultural traditions of the Silver Age, as well as for the future of Gogol's legacy in the time of swift and radical social change in postrevolutionary Russia.

The battle for Gogol in the twenties and thirties, including the many contradictory interpretations of his work, exemplifies the drama of Russian literature during the period of the first cultural revolution, when the past role of literature is undergoing reevaluation with consequences for its future. The stages of this battle and its main principles reflect the complex process of creation of the Soviet canon, implicated in state politics up to the hegemony of Socialist Realism decreed in 1932 with Stalin's decree "On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations." It is in the foreground of this process that the battle lines were drawn between the modernists and the new Soviet critics.

The consciousness of the far-reaching importance of this transitional period reflected in the work of Bely and Remizov was shared by their contemporary, Ivanov-Razumnik. In his introduction to the 1925 publication of a collection of essays, *Contemporary Literature* (*Sovremennaiia literatura*), he is quite clear that only an unbiased critical evaluation of its past can enable an understanding of its present and mark the probable paths of its future. According to the editors of the extensive correspondence of Bely and Ivanov-Razumnik, this collection "saw the light of day after prolonged delays and without its editor's name." It was in fact the last time the name of this major representative of Silver Age criticism appeared in print.¹ In the essay "A Look and Something" (*Vzgliad i nechto*), printed under the pseudonym Ippolit Udush'ev, or "Short-of-breath," Ivanov-Razumnik provides valuable insights into the literary

¹ *Andrei Belyi — Ivanov-Razumnik: Perepiska*, edited by A. V. Larov and John Malmstad (St. Petersburg: Feniks, 1998), 16.

process of the time: “It is quite likely that, after a great creative wave of ascent in Russian literature of the first quarter of the century, we may be witnessing its abatement, which can also continue for some decades”² In order to understand how Bely and Remizov positioned themselves in this context, it is useful to heed Ivanov-Razumnik and remember the prior history and some of the central premises of the prerevolutionary reception of Gogol from the turn of the century onward.

The Prerevolutionary Period

One of the earliest statements of change in the modernist reception of Gogol was the speech of Innokentii Annenskii, “Gogol’s Artistic Idealism,” on 21 February 1902, dedicated to the anniversary of Gogol’s death. Annenskii appears to protect Gogol from the conventional realist interpretation, that is, of an ideological interpretation of his work: “Russian literature does not have a work of greater realist energy. That which we designate as Gogol’s *realism* is something higher: it is not so much precision, as the beauty of depiction, its highest intelligence and expediency. ... The symbols of the great Russian epic are ‘grand and fine for the real world.’” A few years later, in his 1906 essay on “The Aesthetics of *Dead Souls* and Its Legacy,” Annenskii points to the *locus classicus* of Russian literature. “Pushkin and Gogol. Our two-faced Janus. Two mirrors of the door that separates us from our antiquity.” His words had a momentous effect on his contemporaries, the writers who would be Gogol’s heirs. Whereas Pushkin was the crown of old Russia, Gogol was something utterly different, as he “stood facing the future of Russian literature with terror and torment. He stands before it as a genius ... People did not go to Gogol, they went onward from Gogol.”³

In fact, the year 1906 marks a heated polemic concerning Gogol’s legacy. Vasily Rozanov takes a different position, advocating a resistance to Gogol and a return to Pushkin, thus marking the trend which would come to be known as “beautiful clarity” from the eponymous statement of Mikhail Kuzmin in 1910. Bely and Remizov will be the conscious

² In *Sovremennaiia literatura. Sbornik statei* (Leningrad: Mysl’, 1925), 161.

³ I. Annenskii, “Estetika ‘Mertyvkh dush’ i ee nasledie,” *Kniga otrazhenii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), 228.

Gogolians in this context. Gogol's preeminence in the early twentieth century was announced by the unveiling of the writer's monument in 1909. The complex cultural history leading up to its creation is emblematic of the cultural wars surrounding the centennial of Gogol's birth. Contemporaries were reminded that, even during his lifetime, Gogol had never belonged to himself, but was always the subject of the Empire, of society and the church. In his book, *Russia: People and Empire: 1552-1917*, the British historian Geoffrey Hosking writes in the chapter on "Literature as Nation Builder" that the "battle for Gogol, for the second part of *Dead Souls* became emblematic ...for the position of writers in his time ..."⁴

The Symbolists, in their revision of the nineteenth-century canon as established by Belinsky and the radical critics of the sixties and seventies, also took stock of that past before reevaluating the significance of Gogol's legacy for their time. The difference in their position is evident from a rather expressive note in Blok's diary of 1913:

Satire. There is no such thing. It is the Belinskys who shat on the word and did it to the point that artists, including myself, are capable of being fooled when thinking of "attacking the mores." ... The Belinskys came and said that Gogol and Griboedov "ridiculed" ... And here begins the deformation of Russian consciousness—of language, of genuine morality, religious consciousness, conception of art, down to the smallest detail—and a complete destruction of taste.⁵

The prerevolutionary critical approach to Gogol continues in the 1924 monograph of V. Gippius, in which he offers a philosophical, rather than sociological interpretation of pathos in *Dead Souls*. He claims that if the novel became subject to social and historical interpretations, it was not Gogol's will. This is precisely what Belinsky understood. And this is precisely what Soviet critics understood in following Belinsky.

⁴ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 298.

⁵ *Dnevnik Aleksandra Bloka*, ed. P. N. Medvedev (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1928), 218-219.

Postrevolutionary Shifts

After the Revolution, the Formalists made an important critical shift away from the nineteenth-century philanthropic and social approach to Gogol, in which Akakii Akakievich's poignant implosion in "The Overcoat"—"Why do you torment me ..., gentlemen?"—was treated as an expression of the anguish of the "poor clerk." In the words of Visarion Belinsky, it sounded the tragic significance of Gogol's comic prose. The pointedly modern title of Boris Eikhenbaum's essay "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' is Made" (1919), focused instead on the exotic verbal gestures of Akakii, who favored and repeated particles in his often monosyllabic rejoinders. These are the mainstay of the Gogolian *skaz*, or representation of orality in print. This finding bears affinity with the modernists' Gogol. However, the old philanthropic interpretation found a second life in Soviet criticism from the thirties onward. At that time the last battle for the modernist Gogol continued in both realms of the divided Russian nation, providing the context for the conscious efforts of Bely and Remizov in championing and rescuing "their" Gogol.

As noted earlier, the end of the twenties and the early thirties represent a transitional period in Soviet history and in the cultural revolution. The 75th anniversary of Gogol's death was observed in 1927, and it became frighteningly clear once again that Gogol now belonged to the new state. In 1931 his remains were moved from the Danilov to the Novodevochii Monastery, and the symbolic stone from Golgotha, along with the cross, were taken away.⁶ This treatment continued into the late Stalinist period, when in 1951 a new tombstone, with a bust by N. V. Tomskii, was placed on the grave, where the dark face of the writer now had a smile. The hundredth anniversary of Gogol's death, 1952, was commemorated with the opening of a new monument, with the inscription "from the government of the Soviet Union."⁷ In Nosov's brilliant remark, "the monument becomes the actor of capricious history, the sort that only one person could have invented—the one who it seemed lay in peace underneath it for eternity."⁸

⁶ V. D. Nosov, *Kliuch k Gogoliu* (London, 1985), 95.

⁷ Boris Zemenkov, *Pamiatnye mesta Moskvyy* (Moscow, 1959), 124.

⁸ Nosov, *Kliuch k Gogoliu*, 90.

Bely's Struggle for Gogol

Bely was at work on *Gogol's Artistry* from August 1931, as he writes in the Author's Introduction: "My study is a modest effort to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of 'Nikolai Gogol's' first work seeing the light of day."⁹ Bely's letters to Ivanov-Razumnik during this period reflect the drama of working on the book in the complex conditions of literary life in the thirties. This correspondence is an invaluable resource which conveys the atmosphere of the time. In a letter to Ivanov-Razumnik of 21 February 1932, Bely writes: "I am working like a ...: in all directions at once: I run to GIKhL [the publishing house], I am writing 'Gogol', becoming more and more intricate and slower (a lace of images, connected by citations)."¹⁰ In a letter of 5 July, Bely writes about publication plans: "During all this time I achieved one thing: the three books, *Masks*, *Gogol*, and *Beginning of the Century*, will all, in principle, come out this year.... *Gogol* was given to Voronskii for a reading and he gave me all sorts of compliments, that he is excited about it; and this decided the book's fate. ... Voronskii was really supportive with *Gogol*, arguing that every university students needs it."¹¹ Bely also explains the significance of Voronskii's reaction during this period: "This approval really buoyed me, because working on it for nine-and-a-half months, I really had no idea what it is I wrote (perhaps nonsense); morally, the feeling was unpleasant and I almost decided that perhaps I won't write any more, thinking that I may have written myself out."¹²

At the same time, Bely is aware of the historic importance of his book, as he points to Gogol's uninterrupted role, in which his heirs are not only Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev, but also "Mayakovsky, Sologub, Blok, and Bely."¹³ Speaking of the transmission history of Gogol's legacy, Bely writes: "Gogol twice passed through our literature like a wind: In the middle of the last century and at the beginning of this one; 'young pre-revolutionary writers' learned a great deal from Gogol."¹⁴ Bely's own con-

⁹ Andrei Bely, *Gogol's Artistry*, trans. Christopher Colbath (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 38.

¹⁰ *Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik: perepiska*, 694.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 703-704.

¹² *Ibid.*, 704.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

nection with Gogol lasted to the end of his life. George Nivat writes that Bely's work on his last novels coincided with a return to Gogol as writer and critic, and "as a result of his constant re-reading of Gogol, there is the verbal 'mosaic,' the fireworks of hyperbole in *Masks*, as well as the book on *Gogol's Artistry*."

As a writer and critic, Bely was mostly interested in the technical analysis of Gogol's art, of his "stylistic devices," since he felt that "however much is written on Gogol's style, little has been said."¹⁵ He sets forth the methodology of his work: "The goal of this project is narrow" and consists of "an introduction to Gogol's vocabulary, to elements of his poetic grammar."¹⁶ Bely provides a description of his method as a structural analysis of text: "finishing a chapter on plot, I finish the palpation of Gogol's great mastery: the palpation revealed three superimposed layers: meaning, image, and verbal; thought equivalent to the style, verbal art, tendency, color, rhythm; there is no clear boundary between them ..."¹⁷

In a direct departure from the previous century's critical tradition, Bely refuses to deal with Gogol's "humor," and instead directs attention to the unity of "form and content."¹⁸ This approach is evident in the chapter on "Imagery and Sound in 'Terrible Vengeance.'" Bely's description of the master's *chiaroscuro* is intricate and precise: "Every scene of 'Terrible Vengeance' is composed of moments, some quite little, others consciously thrown into obscurity, as into a dream ..."¹⁹ Bely submits the tale's colors to an analysis, noting the dominant red along with black and blue, remarking that "a specific color accompanies each of the three main characters."²⁰ He also undertakes a detailed analysis of the tale's rhythm and demonstrates that "Terrible Vengeance" is a song-tale, "imbued throughout with the sounds of folk *lad* ..." and "with the rhythm of laments." He shows how the tale can be "retold in short lines, paying attention to pauses and to rhythmic pulse," when "verbal repetition

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹⁶ Bely, *Gogol's Artistry*, 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

turns a rhyme.”²¹ As we will see, this type of analysis will also dominate Remizov’s study.

Bely’s struggle for Gogol, however, began in 1926, well before the writing of his book, during the polemic surrounding Meyerhold’s staging of Gogol’s “Inspector General.” In his book on Meyerhold, Rudnitsky underscores the significance of the staging and of the reaction to it:

“Meyerhold’s intent was to stage not the ‘Inspector,’ but Gogol as a certain artistic whole, Gogol as a style, Gogol as a special world, as Russia. . . . The history of theater had not experienced anything like the discussion that broke out around the ‘Inspector.’ Dozens of passionate disputes, countless numbers of contradictory reviews—both flattering and critical, as well as epigrams, and feuilletons”²²

The symbolic significance of Gogol in the literary battles of the cultural revolution is graphically revealed in two artistic events. Both the reactions to Meyerhold’s staging of the “Inspector General,” along with responses to Shostakovich’s opera “The Nose” (1930) convey the period’s atmosphere in sharp outlines. The ideological underpinning of the polemic are evident in the satirical verse feuilleton of Demyan Bedny (*Izvestiia*, 27 January 1927). Using folk rhymes and verbal puns, Bedny pans the production as anachronistic, its aesthetic harkening back to the prerevolutionary symbolist journal *The Golden Fleece*, and its nonsensical character attributed to the virulently anti-revolutionary émigré writer, Dmitrii Merezhkovsky. It is clear that the attack on Meyerhold’s aesthetic is ideologically based and tied to the Silver Age aesthetic.

Bely took an active part in the polemics in 1926 with a public lecture on “Gogol and Meyerhold,” published the following year, which conveys the flavor of the polemic: “For two months there has been an outcry in Moscow: Meyerhold insulted Gogol . . . Gogol laughed in a healthy laughter and Meyerhold killed that laughter; for a century Gogol’s theater was carried by the ‘shields of tradition’; Meyerhold broke the shields and Gogol fell, splintering into smithereens. How to restore Gogol?” Furthermore, Bely notes the national symbolism of the struggle for Go-

²¹ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

²² Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Meyerhold the Director*, trans. George Petrov (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981), 350.

gol: “it behooves Moscow, all of Moscow, to go against Meyerhold; Moscow, which did not see Meyerhold’s ‘Inspector’, is agitated: blood was sucked out of our national genius ...” The polemically charged tone of Bely’s answer carries an ironically simple advice to his contemporaries: “re-read Gogol while his text has not yet been destroyed by Meyerhold.” This is the advice Bely will follow in his book on *Gogol’s Artistry*, as if creating an exemplary teaching aid for serious critical reading and analysis.

In the last chapter of his book, Bely affirms that the “evolution of the Gogolian tradition continues,” adding that “it is only half-a step from Mayakovsky to Meyerhold.”²³ Bely poses a provocative question: “What constitutes the modernism of the staging?” He answers by asserting that the “lamentation about ‘the distortion’ of Gogol is laughable, when there is actually a ‘restoration’ of live Gogolian gesture.”²⁴ Then he challenges the opponents: “Meyerhold took Gogol out of the very coffin of his *Collected Works*.”²⁵ If anything, these words represent a definite continuation of the prerevolutionary reevaluation of Gogol’s legacy by the modernists, who were intent on rescuing Gogol from Belinsky’s canon.

Bely’s defense of the historic significance of Meyerhold’s staging as a “last achievement not only of the Russian, but also of world stage,” and as “a sign that Gogol, the master lives on in us,” finds further proof in Remizov’s reaction to the traditional staging of the play. In the Gogol chapter in his book, *The Fire of Things*, Remizov writes about “Inspector General”: “I don’t know a more boring play. And even though every scene has comic situations, still, the boredom is staggering. This is the feeling I had since childhood, when we were made to go see ‘The Inspector’. It’s comical, but somehow not quite funny.”²⁶

The last chapter of *Gogol’s Artistry* and Bely’s Meyerhold lecture show that he was quite conscious of the drama of this historic moment, experienced as the end of an era which he had represented up to that time. At the same time, there are some heterogeneous, strange phrases and into-

²³ Belyi, *Masterstvo Gogolia*, 340.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁶ A. Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei; sny i predsonè: Gogol’, Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoevskii* (Paris: Oplëshnik, 1954), 102.

nations noticeable in his analysis that crop up from the immediate Soviet historical context. For example, there are some anachronisms through which Soviet reality slips in: “Chichikov, deprived of land ownership, is a proletarian.”²⁷ Bely recalls various interpretation of Gogol’s contemporaries, such as Chernyshevsky, who understood just what frightened Aksakov, and that was precisely that “Gogol felt the rhythm of future revolutions.”²⁸

Ivanov-Razumnik noted this as well and, having read Bely’s book *Gogol’s Artistry* in its entirety as it appeared posthumously, he wrote to the writer’s widow, K. Bugaeva, on July 1, 1934: “I am reading this book (parallel with Gogol’s works) already for the third time, with a pencil in hand. The book is stunning—but who among us didn’t know that B. N. [Boris Nikolaevich] was brilliant, bringing to life everything that he touched.” He remembers their discussions as Bely read parts of the book which now reflects their polemics: “I still find unacceptable two aspects of this book: the ‘Peverzev’ and the ‘Merezhkovsky’ aspects. For me these are the dark spots.”²⁹ At the same time, Ivanov-Razumnik explains that B. N. knew that he could not get the book through the “censorship and publishing Thermopylae, without giving it a Marxist turn and in this he was wrong ... And what point was there in talking about ‘class’ and ‘dynamics of the capitalist process’? All the more so that the rest of the book is absolutely admirable, that is about 3/4”³⁰ Earlier that spring he had written to his wife about reading “this stunning book.”

The tragedy of Gogol’s last years was in the situation of conflict for the writer, because “the struggle between command and demand is sickness.”³¹ These words are also applicable to Bely in the last years of writing. He contributed to the writers’ collection *How We Write* (1930), where he speaks of the difficulties of writing in the first years of working on the book, noting that “writing that’s rubbish pleases more,” and that “Bely, the artist, is a dreary one ... The reader is angry, the critic is

²⁷ Bely, *Gogol’s Artistry*, 106-107.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁹ Lavrov, A.V. and John Malmstad, “Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik: preduvedomlenie k perepiske” in *Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik: perepiska*, 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹ Bely, *Gogol’s Artistry*, 113.

angry ... Bely is hard to understand.”³² In writing about himself, Bely is aware of the difficulty of his last novels, because they are “in conflict between ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’, between the art of the book and that of life, between the study and the auditorium....”³³ These words convey the complexity of the writer’s position at the time of the Great Divide of Stalin’s Cultural Revolution and the adoption of Socialist Realism.

Remizov

Along with Bely, his illustrious contemporary, Remizov was well aware of Gogol’s historic importance and, along with Innokentii Annenskii’s maxim of 1906, Remizov affirms with a witty flourish the great legacy of Pushkin and Gogol: “It all began with Pushkin, and continued on from Gogol” (*S Pushkina vse nachinaetsia, a poshlo ot Gogolia*).³⁴ In the chapter titled “Though the Road is Endless” (*Khot’ bespreryvnaia doroga*), Remizov writes: “Speaking of Gogol, one must first of all remember that he was one of the most gifted among the gifted ever born on this earth. And as the most gifted and unlike anyone else, he was a loner on this earth.” Continuing further the modernist critical tradition, Remizov writes: “The charm of Gogol’s word is unique and he came to this word with an unusual knowledge.”³⁵ And the kinship with the master and the extremely personal nature of Remizov’s work on the writer, whom he was always reading, is expressed most simply as “an indirect form of confession.”

Remizov continued to think about and work on Gogol during the years of emigration. Because Remizov had been living abroad since 1921, Bely could not include him among Gogol’s heirs. Although Remizov’s book of literary essays, *The Fire of Things*, was not published until 1954, his essays on Gogol, as his writing on Turgenev, date back to the early thirties. In his letter of 29 February 1952 to Natalia Kodrianskaia, Remizov writes: “Gogol’s Fate, which will be part of the book, *The Fire of Things*,

³² E. Nikitina, *Gogol’ i Meyerhold: sbornik* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo literaturno-issledovatel’skoi assotsiatsii TS.D.R.P., 1927), 22-23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 321.

³⁴ Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 123.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

was written twenty years ago.”³⁶ Several publications in press attest to this. Among them are “Gogol’s Nature” (*Priroda Gogolia*) and “Gogol’s Secret” (*Taina Gogolia*) in *Volia Rossii*, 819 (Paris, 1929). In his “Graphic diary” (*Graficheskii dnevnik*), Remizov describes a dream in which he saw M. O. Gershenzon (died in 1926), to whom he says: “I am writing about Gogol and it would be interesting to hear you on that”³⁷ Work on Gogol continued in the post-war period. In the Bakhmeteff archive there is a note, where Remizov speaks of “Gogol’s wake” and his reading: “I am reading ‘The Moon Flight’ (*Lunnyi polet*)—the dream of the philosopher Khoma Brut, from ‘Vii’ (written in 1833—117 years ago, when Gogol was twenty four years old).”³⁸ “Learning to write like Tolstoy isn’t much. It is the same as learning to speak according to Stolpner. Gogol is something else altogether: reading him one can follow his verbal architectonics.”³⁹ At the same time, Remizov, along with Bely, reminds his contemporaries about “learning how to read Gogol” (*A Revizora nado nauchit’sia chitat*).⁴⁰

This is how Remizov explains his own method of reading Gogol: “Only that which had no proof, like faith, the source of legends, that brings historical document to life.”⁴¹ Remizov thinks of a creative biography and of human history, in terms of “the battle and change of myths: the myth of the divine, the myth of freedom, of love.” He explains his approach as a creative process: “The choice of literary material is not guess work or whatever happens to be at hand. And what does it mean that something arrested my attention? It is an encounter and a memory of the past.”⁴² Remizov’s words on the fiftieth anniversary of Turgenev’s birth present his method: “To enliven the bones—only legend can breathe life into them, and only in legend does memory of a person live on ... Legend is the breath of life”⁴³ An organic connection between Remizov’s method and Gogol’s work, and the mythological conception

³⁶ Kodrianskaia, *Aleksei Remizov*, 247.

³⁷ Bakhmeteff Archive, Alexei Remizov Manuscripts, Box 1, Kladi v meshok - doma razberem. Sny. 2/VII/1933-22 XII, 1933.

³⁸ “Polet Gogolia,” Bakhmeteff Archive, Alexei Remizov Manuscripts, Box 3 (1950).

³⁹ Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 139.

of the writer's own creative identity is confirmed by such scholars as V. E. Vatsuro.

In his literary analysis, Remizov considers dream as "a literary device."⁴⁴ At the same time, dream is also a means of cognition and, in fact, "in Russian literature it is rare that a work foregoes dreams ... dreams supply knowledge, consciousness, and foresight."⁴⁵ Remizov is interested in how "hyperconscious meaning is conveyed in" creativity.⁴⁶ He delineates an alternative idea of creative realism, one in which "dreams as a special reality (essence) ... first appear in Pushkin."⁴⁷

Remizov's analysis of the "Terrible Vengeance" confirms the tale's importance for both writers. Remizov's collection in the Bakhmetev archive contains a text of the dreams of Katerina and Pan Danila from the tale, copied in an even hand with underlining of especially expressive phrasing. A detailed study of such passages reveals Remizov's "internship." The dream of Pan Danila is followed by a commentary in which Remizov analyzes the deep structure of Gogol's style in a detailed analysis of the dream, noting nuances of light: "seven stages of dream—seven color bands: 1) pale gold, 2) transparent blue, 3) rose with a quiet ring, 4) black, 5) dark-blue with silver, 6) black, 7) resounding rose." This is followed by an analysis of the Gogolian syncretism, where synaesthesia is indicated: "the passage of words into a sounding crescendo, the transformation of light into sound, passage from eye to ear, color can speak as colors have various sounds."⁴⁸

Remizov also underscores the historical and literary significance of these dreams. For example, the complex dream of Pan Danila, who sees Katerina's dream in his, is considered as the single such example in literature: "To see in a dream what someone else is dreaming is a rare phenomenon, found maybe only in Lermontov." In the chapter "The Moon Flight" (*Lunnyi polet*), he writes about the dream in "VII": "The only dream among human dreams with flesh and blood and breath."

In his remarks on the Gogol criticism, Remizov continues the modernist dialogue about Gogol, while carrying on a polemic with both the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 128.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 30

émigré and Soviet critics. He continues his conversation with the late Symbolist contemporaries Annenskii and Blok as he writes in a chapter titled “The Tadpoles”: “The soul knows more than consciousness.”⁴⁹ There is an echo of a prerevolutionary conversation with Blok, who in his essay “Gogol’s Child” wrote about the writer’s “unvanquished inner anxiety” and its source in “the creative torment, which was Gogol’s life.” The poet thought that “like a woman, Gogol carried his progeny under his heart” and that child is Russia, whose “sparks appeared to Gogol like a blinding vision in a brief creative dream.”

Remizov is close to Bely when he affirms that Gogol’s role in Russian literature has remained uninterrupted, underscoring Gogol’s importance for such writers as Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy.” Following Dostoevsky, Remizov continues his aphorism about “The Overcoat”: “And besides all of Russian literature came from under Gogol and without *Dead Souls* there would be no *War and Peace*.”⁵⁰ In speaking of contemporary literature, Remizov mentions Gogol’s importance for Bely’s prose and underscores an important discovery he made in Bely’s critical work: “Bely’s view of Gogol as a poet in prose, who erased the boundary between ‘verse’ and ‘prose,’ is of enormous importance: as if it weren’t clear that for poetry everything is form and there are no special forms.”⁵¹

In the drafts of the book, preserved in the Amherst archive, there are versions of the Gogol chapters, along with texts not included in the published edition. It would appear that preparing the book for the centennial of Gogol’s death that was to be celebrated in the Soviet Union in 1952 (the book came out in 1954), Remizov was aware of the significance of his collection, since his contemporaries had been silent for some time, especially Bely. In this context, it is worth noting what Remizov did not include in the book, especially his remarks about sexuality in Gogol. In speaking about Gogol’s character, Shponka, for example—who is 38 years old, unmarried, and not fond of women—Remizov saw this as autobiographical, underscoring Gogol’s remark: “If he were to marry, he would not know what to do with her.” Remizov adds, however, that

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰ Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 66.

⁵¹ Ibid., 130.

“theoretically Gogol was not innocent, he knew details that are familiar only to those with experience in seduction.” These remarks leave no doubt that Remizov was familiar with Freud and the Russian Freudian school. It is all the more interesting that Remizov understood the drama of Gogol’s sexuality but left such analysis out of his volume. The connection between the writer’s sexuality and his creativity would become a subject of Western scholarly research some twenty years later.

An uninterrupted connection with Gogol becomes especially important after the Revolution. In his experimental chronicle of the revolutionary years, *Whirlwind Russia*, Remizov addresses Blok in a chapter dedicated to the poet’s memory with a question: “How to write?” His answer to the question places Gogol at the center: “Gogol is the most contemporary writer. Gogol!—to him is turned the soul of the new emerging Russian literature with its word and its eye.”⁵² Remizov’s chronicle provides the proof for this with a description of the hero of “The Overcoat,” Akakii Akakievich, who returns to revolutionary Petrograd in the chapter titled “Sabotage.” Akakii Akakievich is a skeptic who refuses to work and to submit to authority, even when threatened with prison: “...so, if I must be destroyed, so be it, but I don’t want to work and that’s all there’s to it.”⁵³ Remizov provides fantastic descriptions of life in revolutionary Petrograd: “Terrible and strange things are occurring in Petrograd, things even Gogol didn’t dream about.” To this, we can add that a “recanonicalization” of the Russian classics taking place just over a decade later would not have occurred in either Pushkin’s or Gogol’s dreams.

In his book of essays Remizov carries on a polemic with critics in emigration and in the Soviet Union: “Six years after his death, in 1958, there appeared an article by Pisemsky concerning the publication of Part II of *Dead Souls*. Pisemsky’s words about Gogol’s fate as a writer, who was poked by critics to this day, going on to advise readers to love this charming writer, “because this love will serve as a beginning of mutual understanding and interests.”⁵⁴ Remizov cites Pisemsky: “There are probably few among great writers who took so long in becoming favorites

⁵² Remizov, *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, 514.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁴ Remizov, *Ogon' veshchei*, 22.

of the reading public as had Gogol.” And further, “finally society had to be educated by his followers before it was able to *understand* the significance of his work, to *love* it, and having studied it, to take it apart into sayings.”⁵⁵ The approach to Gogol’s legacy has a personal significance for Remizov and the following words are relevant to writers’ fate in general: “But before public opinion was solidified, how much insulting lack of understanding and ignorant reproaches he had to sustain!”⁵⁶

The full meaning of these words for Remizov is further confirmed by a note found in the Amherst archive: “Seventy years (1933) after Pisemsky’s article (1856), the Paris Russian journal *Numbers* aimed straight at the brow, if not the eye, to begin anew!” Remizov is referring to the speech of A. N. Alferov, “The Émigré Everyday” (*Emigrantskie budni*), which was presented to a meeting of the Green Lamp (*Zelenaia Lampa*) literary society, with the text printed in the journal.⁵⁷ Alferov speaks of “the émigré desire to preserve their way of life,” something that literature could help with, but unfortunately, it does not serve as “a source of observations,” which could help readers figure out the complexities of émigré life. Moreover, older writers don’t understand the younger ones, who are trying “to find themselves.” This is followed by Alferov’s advice, which Remizov referred to above with such irony: “Why shouldn’t writers try to *love* the reader; only such a feeling can lay a path to mutual *understanding* and interest to one another.”

It is not hard to understand Remizov’s reaction. Both he and his contemporary, the poet Marina Tsevtseva, were often reprimanded that their writing is difficult to understand. Curiously enough, it is possible to discern some coincidence between émigré and Soviet criticism with its emphasis on “social command” and on direct reflection of Soviet reality in literature. As Remizov reminds us, “Gogol didn’t readily decide to include his early stories in his *Collected Works*. It could not have been otherwise; a work of art is not measured by the ‘what for’ and by ‘utility’ but for its ‘viability and indissoluble impressions.’”⁵⁸ It becomes increasingly clear that for both Remizov and Bely, Gogol as a verbal artist remains a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Chisla* 7 (1933).

⁵⁸ Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 25.

model of aesthetic criteria precisely because of his “viability and indissoluble impressions.”

Although, because of a difference in their circumstances, Remizov’s book could not have as acute a sense of Soviet reality as had Bely’s, there are references to current conditions there in *The Fire of Things*, such as the above-cited comments on writers and readers. In Remizov’s chapter on Nozdrev from *Dead Souls*, there is an explanation of Gogol’s phrase “the subtlest superfluosity” as the “highest degree of perfection.”⁵⁹ To Gogol’s expression Remizov adds words that sound like a comment on Russian utopianism: “I want perfection not only in things, but also in human beings.”⁶⁰ There are also amusing anachronisms, such as “Chichikov’s father was occupied with psychoanalysis.”⁶¹ Remizov’s wit comes through in sharp puns, one of them addressed to another critic of the Paris emigration, Georgii Adamovich: “It’s not the Gogols here, but the sober heirs of Adam, we the Adamoviches, have fractured imagination.”⁶²

Russia’s Stalinist context is more apparent in Remizov’s themes from *Dead Souls* in his drawing albums, found in the Paris archive of N. Reznikova. The drawings are complementary to the critical essay on the novel in the *Fire of Things*. The albums are composed of drawings with subtitles, which sometime consist of quotations from the novel and other times present new texts. The whole is a sort of meditative riff on Gogol’s masterpiece, composed for Remizov’s own time. The text to the three drawings from “Resurrection of the Dead” (1931), correspond to the novel: “And there I will resettle them all! To the Kherson province! Let them live there!”⁶³ The paraphrase of Gogol in the text to the comical portrait of Chichikov appears to continue this thought: “Isn’t there in me some part of Chichikov?”⁶⁴; this might be compared with his remark in *The Fire of Things*: “Gogol says that there is a bit of Chichikov in everyone.”⁶⁵

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶³ *Album*, 18; Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 47.

⁶⁴ *Album*, 21.

⁶⁵ Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 52.

New intonations appear in the 1951 album with an extended title: "Russia is a very extensive nation, the Kherson province. The resettlement of dead souls with the convoy." The book contains a brief passage about the resettlement of the dead souls: "Through the morning drama before Chichikov eyes stretched the quiet crowds, the dead transients, accompanied by the armed guard."⁶⁶ As one can see from the album's ironic text arranged in free verse, this appears to be a commentary on Stalinist politics, conveying the rumor that the Russian man, who can get used to anything, goes to Kamchatka, and the peaceable peasants volunteer for resettlement.

Conclusion:

Both Bely's and Remizov's critical writings about Gogol belong to the Russian modernist tradition. Their work contains a wealth of material for contemporary Gogol scholars as well as for the historian of twentieth-century Russian literature. Both writers convey the complexity of their experience of modernity and history, raising innovative questions concerning individual creativity in the new context of literary life in the Soviet Union and in Russia Abroad. Anxiety about the future of literature, reflected in their critical work as demonstrated above, conveys the cultural atmosphere of the period, along with the acute consciousness of this being the last moment in which they could register their literary position and cultural memory of Gogol's art.

The connection with prerevolutionary literature, disrupted by the Revolution and years of Soviet rule, was renewed in the 1980s during the perestroika period. Among many memoirs published at this time, of special interest are the recollections of the Soviet writer, Aleksandr Gladkov, of a speech of Bely's heard about half-a-century earlier. Gladkov recalls the strong impression made by "the last Mohican" of the Silver Age. The speech, devoted to the Moscow Art Theater's production of *Dead Souls*, had been delivered in late January of 1933 at the Herzen House and "it was brilliant in the true sense of the word." Indeed, Gladkov remembered the occasion for the rest of his life: "For me that evening was memorable, because I sensed the style and 'air' of the sym-

⁶⁶ "Rossiia....." (album).

bolist salons, as if transferred a quarter of a century back to Viacheslav Ivanov's Tower." That evening taught the young Gladkov that there was "nothing accidental or neutral in the image system of real art" and that "the hyperbolism of the analysis was to the point, specific and had an affinity with Gogol's genius, hence justified." This memory is all the more significant since Bely and his culture had been absent from history for several decades.

The importance of cultural memory for the recreation of the forgotten memory of Russian modernism is underscored in a collection of memoirs, *The Silver Age in Russia*, published in Moscow in 1993: "Between these two points, the eighteen nineties and the end of the nineteen twenties, the whole history of the Silver Age is contained, the history which to a great extent had turned for us into legend, impossible to understand to the same extent, if not to a greater degree, than the eighteenth century or the Pushkin era."⁶⁷ The continuity of Gogol's myth, with the active participation of Bely and Remizov, represents an important page in the history of the Silver Age in revolutionary Russia. In Osip Mandelstam's words, Soviet society was divided into "friends and enemies of the word" at the time when the last battle for Gogol and his legacy was staged on both sides of the revolutionary divide.

⁶⁷ *Serebrianyi vek v Rossii: izbrannye stranitsy*, ed. V. V. Ivanov, V. T. Toporov, T. V. Tsivian (Moscow: Radiks, 1993), 146.